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# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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# CARDULA'S REVENGE



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“It’s that beast Van Jelsing again,” Nadia said.

I raised an eyebrow. “By this time that man must certainly be in his hundreds.”

She shook her head. “The original Van Jelsing is dead. This is his grandson, Professor Van Jelsing the Third. But he, too, shares the family obsession.”

“Is he after anyone in particular this time?”

MAGAZINE

CARDULA'S REVENGE

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"I don't think so. Ostensibly he is here in America on a lecture tour, peddling his favorite subject. But no doubt he will also be sniffing around. Just having him in the neighborhood sends shivers up and down my spine."

Nadia's eyes appraised my office, the furniture of which consisted of a desk, two chairs, a filing cabinet, and one typewriter. She was not very impressed. "My friends told me that you were now a private detective."

I nodded. "One must live. Everything I brought over from the old country eventually had to be pawned."

Nadia's smile was rather self-satisfied. "I invested everything I had in Xerox, at the very beginning. Now I live in Wurthington Hills."

Nadia had raven-black hair, an eye-catching pale complexion, and wore obviously expensive clothes. "Do you remember Yvette of Strasbourg?"

"Certainly. In the old days she was frequently a weekend guest at the castle. She is a most talented pipe organist. What a magnificent left hand she has."

Nadia made a correction. "Had. Yvette will never play again."

"Van Jelsing?"

"Yes. And have you ever met little Nicco?"

"Of course, the world's leading authority on archaic Latin. It was his natal tongue, you know. Not little Nicco too?"

"Van Jelsing got to him in a wine-storage cavern just outside of Florence." Her thin strong fingers moved convulsively. "I would like to snap Van Jelsing's neck. Crack! Just like that."

And, given the opportunity, she could do it too. I myself have the strength of twenty. And she, perhaps that of thirteen or fourteen.

"Something has got to be done about that man," Nadia said. "But none of us can get near him. He always wears that damn collar around his neck."

Ah, yes. The Van Jelsing leather collar with its numerous cruciform inlays. It is worn under the shirt, and as long as a Van Jelsing, or anyone else for that matter, wears it, he is impregnable—as far as we are concerned.

"Somehow he's got to be caught when he's not wearing that collar," Nadia said. "And that is why I am here. I ask you to take this mission and I am willing to pay you handsomely."

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I pondered. "Where is Van Jelsing now?"

"He's staying at Mamie Bellingham's place while he does a series of lectures at the university. Mamie has invited me over to meet him, of course, but I wouldn't *dream* of getting within a mile of that man."

"Mamie Bellingham?"

"Yes, she is my *dearest* friend. We are practically like sisters. I am jealous only of her ability to tan."

"Nadia," I said, "do you suppose you could wrangle me an invitation to her home?"

"As a matter of fact, she is having a bash over there this Saturday in Van Jelsing's honor. You won't need an invitation because there will be hundreds of people there and Mamie cannot possibly know them all. Just drop in. I am certain no one will try to evict you."

When Nadia was gone, I resumed thinking.

Even when hidden from the eye, the Van Jelsing collar still seemed to provide its wearer with a protective force field. I had, at one time while in a confrontation with Van Jelsing *grand-père*, considered attacking him at some non-traditional point, even going so far as to try the tip of a finger. However, I found that I could not approach within ten feet of him without acute discomfort.

Ah, well, I would just have to wait patiently and seize any opportunity should it present itself.

Early Saturday evening I dropped into a novelty store and purchased a false moustache—a rather formidable Hussar type—on the assumption that while Van Jelsing the Third had never seen me in the flesh, he might still recognize me from old portraits.

I had received directions from Nadia on how to find Mamie Bellingham's estate, and, as I approached the general area, I had no trouble in being specific. The Bellingham house was quite thoroughly lit up.

Once down in the garden, I straightened my tie and proceeded toward the house. When I entered the sizeable drawing room, I saw a circle gathered about someone to the far side of the room.

I heard a voice expounding.

"They have, during the course of the centuries, developed a certain ecological restraint. They no longer completely drain their victims, thereby encouraging overcrowding in their ranks and competition for the available food supply. Instead they now merely stop for a sip here

and a sip there until their need is fulfilled."

One of his audience asked a question. "Why don't their victims raise the alarm?"

"Because the victims are subjected to a hypnotically induced amnesia. They remember nothing of what happened to them. In the morning they wake, feeling perhaps a bit worn and wondering if possibly they are coming down with the Russian flu."

I gradually inched my way forward until I was in a position to get a view of Professor Van Jelsing the Third. He appeared to be the very image of his grandfather, even to the steel-rimmed glasses and the aura of smug pedanticism.

An anxious female voice inquired, "Then they can at this very moment be among us?"

"Yes," Van Jelsing said. He held up a hand to dispel the murmuring. "However, I have a certain sixth sense about their presence and I assure you that there are none of them in this room at the moment."

If this was an example of his sixth sense, I wondered at the condition of his other five.

Van Jelsing smiled complacently. "There are means by which one can distinguish them, and, contrarywise, there are means by which one can undistinguish them."

Very properly, someone asked, "Undistinguish?"

Van Jelsing nodded and pointed a finger directly at me. "You, sir, could not possibly be one of them."

I was a bit taken aback. "And why not, sir?"

"Because you are wearing a moustache. They do not grow moustaches. I don't know why, but they do not."

Another voice spoke up. "If they know that you're hunting them, don't they try to strike back?"

"Ah, yes," Van Jelsing said happily. "They try. But I am invulnerable." He wisked off his string tie in a practiced manner and began to unbutton the top of his shirt.

I averted my eyes, pretending a consuming interest in the condition of my trouser crease.

There was a gasp from Van Jelsing's audience.

"You see," Van Jelsing said. "I wear this collar around my neck at all times. Except when I am taking a shower."

I blinked. Shower?

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He closed the door. "However, I never take a shower except during the daylight hours. You will notice that on this collar I have had my protecting symbol artistically reproduced twenty-four times. I do not believe in taking chances by leaving a blind spot anywhere."

Finally allowing a furtive look, I saw that Van Helsing had rebut-toned his shirt.

Professor Van Jelsing the Third now proceeded to introduce the man at his side. "This is my nephew, Henrik Van Jelsing, my protégé. I have chosen him to carry on my work after I am gone. Unfortunately, all of my own children were daughters and none of them chose to fol-low in my footsteps."

Henrik Van Jelsing was a sturdy individual with straw-colored hair. He had a firm square chin, Holland-blue eyes, and he appeared to be in his early twenties. He nodded modestly. "Originally I was with my father in the gladiola- and tulip-farming business, but the professor convinced my parents that my future lay in other fields. However, in order that I would never forget my roots, on my departure, my mother presented me with a potted gladiola, which I carry always with me in my travels."

I withdrew from the crowd and found myself melancholily regarding the other guests.

One of them seemed a bit familiar.

He was a thin individual with a hairline moustache, rather handsome in a middle-aged way, and there seemed to be the debonair air of the civilized rogue about him.

And now I remembered. It had been Scotland. Lady McDonnelly had been celebrating the reappearance of the Loch Ness Monster after a lapse of several years and it was just about time too. The tourist trade had fallen and the locals were beginning to grumble. Yes, it had been quite a large party.

I frowned. But that wasn't the only time I had seen that man. There had also been the Le Mans Grand Prix and the Contessa Stella's pre-race ball.

I studied him. His attention seemed to return periodically to a rather impressively built woman with glaring red hair some dozen feet away.

Yes, I thought, that must be Mamie Bellingham. Nadia had de-scribed her to me.

Scotland, Le Mans, and now Mamie Bellingham's mansion?

I further refined the area of his attention. It was not Mamie Bellingham herself who drew his interest, it was the shimmering necklace around her neck.

That was it—the common denominator. A casket of Lady McDonnelly's jewelry had been stolen on the night of the Loch Ness ball. It appeared that she had gone to bed drugged, for she slept until noon the next day. When she awakened, she discovered her jewelry missing. And the Contessa Stella. Her blue-white pendant, the Star of Bologna, had also disappeared during the night and she also had apparently been drugged.

I rubbed my chin and then gradually sidled my way toward the man until I was next to him. I didn't know his name, but I said, "Well, well, Mr. Devlin, how nice to see you again."

He regarded me politely. "I'm afraid you have me confused with someone else, sir."

I peered at him for a moment and then admitted my error. "Of course. I'm sorry, I could have sworn I saw you come into my shop with Mamie Bellingham last week when she brought her necklace for repair."

He was faintly interested. "Repair?"

"Yes, the clasp of her necklace was broken and she brought it to me."

"You are a jewelry repairman?"

I chuckled good-naturedly. "Good Jupiter, no. I merely see to these little things to keep my customers happy. I am the junior member of Espanger and Espanger. Perhaps you've heard of us? Last week we sold the Wamberly Sapphire to the Sheik of Imafret. It was one hundred and twelve karats, a beautiful stone."

His estimation of my social value rose. "I see you were able to repair the clasp on Mrs. Bellingham's necklace."

"Unfortunately, no. It was beyond repair and the replacement was of such a distinctive nature that I was forced to send out for it. It hasn't arrived yet."

He stared at Mrs. Bellingham. "What's holding up the necklace? String?"

I laughed lightly. "Oh, *that* necklace. It's just her copy. The original is still waiting in the safe at our establishment."

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He snatched a drink from the tray of a passing waiter. "You mean to say that she's wearing paste? That isn't the real necklace?"

"Goodness, no! Isn't it amazing what can be done with plastic combinations these days?"

He downed the drink.

I smiled. "Yes, I *do* try to keep my customers happy by doing these little shopkeeper favors and they learn to depend upon me. I suppose that was why Mrs. Bellingham sent Van Jelsing to me this morning. One of the larger diamonds in his collar had fallen out and he wanted it re-cemented."

Devlin, or whoever he was, looked Van Jelsing's way with growing interest. "I thought all those sparkles were rhinestones. That's the fanciest dog collar I've ever seen."

"The whites are diamonds," I said. "None less than two karats. The blues are sapphires, and the reds, rubies. And, if I'm not mistaken, there is a touch of lapis lazuli here and there."

Having planted the seed, I now left him with something to think about and made my way to the second floor.

I removed my moustache. It had begun to irritate me tremendously and I gingerly touched my upper lip. Yes, it was swollen and very likely red. Was I allergic to moustaches?

I found a place of concealment and proceeded to wait. How long was this party intended to last? I hoped not into the morning hours.

I was rather relieved when toward 1:00 A.M. I saw Van Jelsing and his nephew ascending the thickly carpeted stairs.

Van Jelsing yawned and seemed to be depending upon his nephew for some support. "I don't know when I've felt so sleepy. It could not have been the drinks. I had only two all evening. Perhaps I have still not adjusted to the jet lag."

His nephew guided him to a door, where Van Jelsing turned. "I'll be all right, Henrik. I just need a little sleep. You go back downstairs and enjoy the party."

Van Jelsing disappeared behind his door and his nephew went back downstairs.

I waited.

It was a matter of perhaps half an hour before I saw Devlin moving silently up the stairway. Evidently he did not know which bedroom



was Van Jelsing's, because he tried several doors before he found the right one.

He slipped into the room and in less than a minute he was out again, a smile on his face, patting his right hand jacket pocket.

I waited until he disappeared down the stairs and then descended from my perch. I flexed my fingers. Within the minute they would be around Van Jelsing's neck.

I opened his door and entered the room. I saw two beds. Evidently Van Jelsing and his protégé shared the huge bedroom.

And there lay Professor Van Jelsing, gently snoring. The first two buttons of his pajama top had been undone and his neck was now bereft of the Van Jelsing collar.

My eyes were diverted to the nightstand beside his nephew's bed. It supported a pot containing the sword-shaped leaves and the crimson blossoms of a single gladiola.

I studied it for a full thirty seconds and then I moved it to the chair next to Van Jelsing's bed.

It was some eleven months later when Professor Van Jelsing came to my office again, his face familiarly haggard. "I am a nervous wreck. I just got out of Lisbon by the skin of my teeth. My plane was taxiing down to the runway when I looked out of a window and there was that idiot nephew of mine with his satchel, watching my plane and rubbing his jaw."

He sat down. "That man is absolutely relentless. You would think that since he is a blood relative, he would spare me. Or at least pursue someone else. But no. I am hounded—Dublin, Oslo, Constantinople, Ulan Bator. Nowhere am I safe. I am haunted by visions of Henrik pursuing me, a hammer in one hand and that damn wooden—"

I commiserated. "He does seem to be quite persistent."

Van Jelsing nodded. "I still don't really know how it all happened. All I remember is that I woke in the middle of the night knowing that I had to get the hell out of Mrs. Bellingham's house before daylight and realizing that it was imperative that I find some of my own native soil. Luckily Henrik's stupid gladiola plant was on a chair next to my bed. I filled my tobacco pouch with some of the soil and departed. Even then I think I would have perished if you hadn't accidentally bumped into me on the street and taken me in for the day."

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He studied me for a moment, as though trying to remember something. "Did you ever wear a moustache?" Then he shrugged. "No. We don't grow moustaches. I don't know why, but we don't." He sighed. "Thank Lucifer, I don't have to transport a bulky box every time I have to move, as it was in the old days. A tobacco pouch under my pillow seems to be sufficient."

I agreed. "Essentially it's the thought that counts."

He wiped his forehead. "I had thought of going down to New Orleans, but I think the high humidity might be bad for my arthritis. I believe I'll try Las Vegas instead."

I approved. "I spent a pleasant six months there several years ago. I had a suite at the Desert Cacti Hotel."

"How are the rates?"

"Quite reasonable."

He looked a bit embarrassed. "What with all this traveling, I seem to have run a little short. You don't suppose that—"

"But of course." I went to my office safe and removed three thousand dollars from the contingency fund Nadia and a few of her wealthy relatives had raised and handed it to Van Jelsing.

He pocketed the money. "I'll pay this back someday."

"I'm certain you will. Do keep in touch."

Two days later I received a phone call from Professor Van Jelsing's nephew. He was in Paris.

"I seem to have lost him again," Henrik said plaintively. "I traced him all the way to the Lisbon airport, but then I wasn't sure whether he was on the night plane to Paris or back in America. I flipped a coin and now I am in Paris, but I do not think he is here."

"He's back in America."

"How can you be certain of that?"

"The Cardula Detective Agency has many contacts. I received a hot tip just this morning that your uncle is now in Las Vegas. You might try the Desert Cacti Hotel."

Henrik was plainly unhappy. "I wish he would hold still. All I am trying to do is put his soul to rest, but he doesn't seem to appreciate it. Frankly, I hate all of this traveling. And it is so expensive."

"Are you perhaps getting low on funds?"

"Well, it is getting to that point again."

"I'll wire you a few thousand."

"That is very kind of you." There was a pause. "Once I have put Uncle to rest, I am giving up this whole business and returning to my gladiolas and tulips."

"But in the meantime, Henrik, hang in there." I smiled. "And good hunting."

He was



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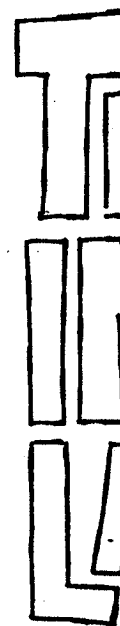
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